

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 152 608

SO 010 480

AUTHOR Mills, James Cobb, Jr.
TITLE Military History for Fun and Profit: The History of War and Military Establishments in the Liberal Arts Curriculum.
PUB DATE 23 Oct 76
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Duquesne History Forum (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 23, 1976)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Armed Forces; Course Content; *Course Descriptions; Course Objectives; *Curriculum Development; Diplomatic History; Educational Needs; Higher Education; *History Instruction; Instructional Materials; *Liberal Arts; *Military Science; National Defense; Political Science; Relevance (Education); Thematic Approach; Time Perspective; Undergraduate Study; *War

ABSTRACT

Although the history of war and military establishments is often neglected in the college liberal arts curriculum, it can be relevant to students and should be offered by history departments. Military history can give liberal arts students a rudimentary understanding of the nature, evolution, and impact of war and familiarize them with some of the literature of military history. Courses should be structured within chronological limits; possible time periods include the 15th-16th century (centralized states, gunpowder, sailing ships, and the beginnings of professional armed forces); the latter 17th-early 18th century (professional standing armies and stable military doctrine); and the period between the Thirty Years War and the French Revolution (predominance of western weapons and military ways). Themes should be developed simultaneously with chronological periods and should deal with topics such as causes and goals of war; consequences of war; social, political, and technological influences; and the history of military thought and doctrine. Military terminology and concepts can be taught through use of several basic textbooks or books on specialized topics which are discussed in a bibliographic note. (Author/DB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED152608

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James Cobb Mills, Jr.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

MILITARY HISTORY FOR FUN AND PROFIT:

THE HISTORY OF WAR AND MILITARY ESTABLISH-
MENTS IN THE LIBERAL ARTS CURRICULUM

by

James Cobb Mills, Jr.
Professor of History
Utica College of
Syracuse University

A paper presented at
The Duquesne History Forum
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
October 23, 1976

501010 480

MILITARY HISTORY FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Why military history - and especially why for fun and profit? I did not choose the title haphazardly nor purely for its shock value. Above all I do not intend it in a facetious sence - the topic obviously merits serious consideration rather than frivolity. Rather I wish to call attention to a neglected area of historical study and teaching - the history of war and and military establishments. There is a further reason. This paper derives from my experiences in a course which I introduced in 1972 and have been teaching every year since then. At the beginning, in spite of an enthusiastic student response, I felt under some pressure to justify its inclusion as an integral part of the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum. For that reason I wrote an article for our college paper, using this same title. Now that I am no longer trying to justify the course within the walls of my own institution but am seeking to share the benefit of my experience with colleagues from other schools, the use of the same title seems to round things out nicely. The course has been well received by the students and has attracted excellent enrollments every time that it has been offered. However we know that enrollment figures would not suffice to justify the inclusion of a course which lacked academic merit, no matter how much pressure there might be to fill the classroom with warm bodies. Therefore I will try to share with you some of my thoughts on the nature of the history

of war and military establishments as a topic for undergraduate liberal arts instruction.

If we stop to reflect upon our knowledge of history we should end up wondering why the study of this topic needs any special justification. After all we must recognize the sad truth that war is one of the most serious and consistent forms of human endeavor. Even if there have been prolonged periods of peace - the Pax Augustana and the early nineteenth century are examples which come to mind - one need not belabor the point that these are clearly exceptions to a well established rule. Further, we will observe that preparations for war and a recognition on all sides of the possibility of war have occupied much attention and consumed great resources during periods of non-belligerency. Thus we should be amazed that we historians have so neglected this form of human activity. The reasons can readily be guessed. The massive killing and maiming of human beings by other human beings, wanton destruction of property, and the disruption of normal lifestyles and institutions is abhorrent to any normally socialized human being and yet exercises a considerable fascination for us. This makes the subject rather sensitive and has led many of us to avoid it completely lest we should become obsessed with it. Civilian historians have tended to avoid serious study of military history or to treat it primarily within the context of diplomatic history, while professional military historians have

most frequently looked at it with the intent of learning lessons which will serve the interest of the military. Both of these approaches have validity, but neither offers adequate coverage of the historical role of war and military establishments as we would wish to present it to liberal arts students. Even when undergraduates come in contact with military history through ROTC the perspective would be much different.

Let us then look at how a course on the history of war and military establishments would have to be structured. First of all we obviously have to set some sort of chronological limits since it is manifestly impossible to give more than a hopelessly superficial treatment if we try to cover every age of recorded history within one term. A case could be made for concentration upon the ancient period. Certainly the Roman Empire, for example, experienced all the different types of warfare, faced all the strategic and political problems of which we can conceive (if one excludes the situation of a war which could annihilate the human race), and grappled with all the questions of military-civil relationships. And there would be the added advantage that the remoteness of classical antiquity would make it easier to study these topics with a minimum of emotional entanglement. All this is true, but chronological remoteness not only has the disadvantage of frightening students, but it also robs them of the opportunity to trace lines of development up to the present. The medieval period seems in many ways less "relevant" than antiquity because of the apparent

primitiveness of tactics and the general lack of strategic sophistication, even though there are some who would disagree. This leaves us somewhat nearer our own time. The fifteenth/sixteenth century would seem to provide one logical beginning point. It witnessed the emergence of embryonic centralized states, relatively large scale use of gunpowder, the first navies composed of heavily gunned sailing ships, the beginning of the European conquest of the non-Western world, and the appearance of what could be considered professional armed forces. However one could opt for the latter seventeenth and early eighteenth century as well. This period included the emergence of clearly professional standing armies with elaborate command structures and logistical systems, clearer delineation of military doctrine, and in general the close integration of military activities into the concept of raison d'etat. We have the additional advantage that this was a truly classical period of warfare: there was (relatively speaking) a stability of military technology, a congruence of strategy and tactics, and an almost universal acceptance of the idea that wars should be fought with limited means to attain limited aims. If we were to start later, the idea of the nation in arms waging war for more all-embracing ends and with all the means at its disposal, the interplay of technological innovation and economic growth with strategy, tactics, and logistics, and the various aspects of what might be called the democratization of warfare - the main developments which we find from the end

of the eighteenth century to the present - would lack historical perspective.

If we accept the period between the Thirty Years War and the French Revolution as the beginning point for this course and we hope to reach at least fairly close to the present, what should our geographical/cultural concentration be? Here it may seem that our own cultural parochialism in preferring the Western world may have at least some real merit. It remains indisputably true that, during the period we would be considering, the West achieved and maintained predominance throughout the world. Many non-Western peoples had highly evolved and sometimes downright remarkable military traditions. However in almost every case where a Western power made a concerted effort to impose its will it succeeded. Indeed the few examples of successful resistance to Western encroachment - Ethiopia against Italy at the end of the nineteenth century or most notably the rise of Japan - clearly resulted from adaptation to Western weapons and Western military ways. Perhaps that may be changing. The Chinese Communists, for example, have added new dimensions to warfare through their exploits against the Kuomintang and the Japanese, but even here one could argue that there was no fundamental break with Western ways of waging war. Within the West, the United States would occupy a secondary place up to the twentieth century since its wars before World War I (except for the Civil War) were relatively minor affairs by the European scale.

What chronological topics should the course cover and what themes should be developed. Obviously it would begin with the "classical" professional military establishments and limited wars of the eighteenth century. Then it should treat the wars of the American and French revolutions with their innovative concept of citizenship and the consequent obligation of the citizen to bear arms in defense of the revolutionary nation. This led, at least in part, to a democratization of military establishments and a far greater involvement of non-combatants in warfare, a process observed and analyzed with relentlessly compelling logic by Carl von Clausewitz. Another theme would also require treatment - the simultaneous growth of the demographic and economic resources of the West and the concomitant evolution of weapons technology. This cluster of developments meant that in Europe far more people would be available for combat duty within the finite limits of the continent and that they would be armed with weapons of far greater destructive power than had ever existed before. All these developments would shatter the carefully nurtured "illusion of limited war" which had prevailed in the century following the Congress of Vienna, even though the American Civil War and the later Russo-Japanese War hinted that total war would be mutual suicide. The West, including its trans-Atlantic extension, the United States, thus drifted into the titanic two-part collision of the World Wars. We should treat these massive attempts at self destruction in as much detail as possible, from the stage

of Germany's Griff nach der Weltmacht ("grab for world power - a Napoleonic drive for hegemony on the European Continent) to global conflagration. Then we must conclude with a look at the post-1945 wars. These can be regarded as tremors of new nations and new forces making adjustments, both in those cases where lesser powers have fought it out between themselves (e.g. the confrontations between India and Pakistan) or with direct aid and participation of at least one of the superpowers (as Korea, Viet Nam, and the Middle East).

Topical themes need to be developed simultaneously with chronological periods. Most obviously, the causes and goals of war and the process of definition of war aims require constant attention even though it would appear naive and even arrogant to think that these questions could be treated exhaustively within the limits of one course. Likewise ambitious but essential is the interrelation of military change with social, political, and technological developments. Conversely we must also consider the consequences of war. Other topics might vie for consideration: the internal history of military establishments as institutions, the history of military thought and doctrine, "informal" or "unofficial" warfare (including guerrilla activity, resistance movements, and perhaps revolutionary terrorism which does not quite attain the level of true warfare), and pacifism and anti-war movements.

One problem remains to be addressed, namely that of instructional materials and methods. Here two considerations

have to be taken into account: the limits of what is available and the teaching style of the instructor as well as the needs of the students. It would be out of bounds for any one instructor to tell another how to teach his/her course or with what texts or other materials. However some observations can be shared. In the area of texts the sad truth is that there are relatively few good titles from which one can choose: Theodore Ropp, War in the Modern World* and Richard A. Preston and Sydney F. Wise, Men in Arms (the latter being the one which I use), are virtually the only ones available which are at all adequate. There are some good works of slightly more specialized or restricted scope, e.g. Geoffrey Blainey, The Causes of War and John Keegan, The Face of Battle. We have a superabundance of books (not too evenly distributed, to be sure) dealing with specific themes or particular wars or operations. The problems of a majority of the books which might be assigned for supplementary or collateral reading are depressingly predictable - they include sensationalism, a tendency to concentrate either on the "blood and guts" side of military history or, to the contrary, to become too technical, and, extremely common, the failure to connect descriptions of specific events with some more general theme. To try to overcome the lack of understanding of elementary military terminology and concepts characteristic of most of my students (and, I would strongly suspect,

* These and other books are discussed in the Bibliographical Note at the end of the paper.

most liberal arts students who would take a course of this nature) I have been working in a desultory fashion on a glossary which will define these terms in historical perspective and will list for easy reference some of the most essential factual data along with some bibliographical suggestions. This project has tended to outstrip my resources of time and knowledge, and so collaborators would be welcomed. As far as audio-visual materials are concerned I will say little. Obviously they can have great value, but they can also seduce an instructor into excesses. Also we are confronted with a relative glut of documentary photographic footage on the wars of the past several decades and very little on earlier periods. Since many lavishly illustrated works on military history are available, it would be a relatively simple matter to prepare slide presentations, but of course one must take care not to infringe copyrights. Nothing can be said of teaching techniques, testing, and related matters except that one should do whatever gives the best results.

Perhaps we should conclude by restating the goals for a course on the history of war and military establishments within the liberal arts curriculum and by asking whether the suggestions I have offered might facilitate our attainment of the goals. I would state the goals in the simplest manner: to give the student a rudimentary understanding of the nature and evolution of war and military establishments in the past two centuries and their impact in shaping the history of the modern world.

Hopefully the basic concepts and major steps would be outlined in a course of this nature, and the student would have the opportunity to familiarize him/herself with some of the literature of military history. One term might be a pathetically short time to do what should be done, and won could feel that it would be good if colleagues in other disciplines would offer support through courses on war and military from the perspectives of their own disciplines. At least we can console ourselves with the thought that we have identified a need and have done what we could to meet it.

* * *

Postscript. If anyone desires a copy of the handouts for this course, he/she should contact me at this address:

James Cobb Mills, Jr.
Department of History
Utica College of Syracuse University
Utica, NY 13502

Of course I would be most pleased to receive copies of other people's course materials or to discuss the topic further in person or in writing.

Bibliographical Note

The following are some of the works which I consider the most essential for anyone who contemplates teaching a course of this sort. Of these, no. 7 is the basic text which I have used with good results; no. 8 is also good. The former attempts to treat the entire scope of human history, while the latter is limited to the period since the Renaissance. Both are available in paperback - an important consideration. An excellent and well documented survey by an outstanding British military theoretist and leader, no. 4, makes a most useful reference work; no. 3 is based on the second part of this longer work. As the title indicates, no. 1 is a study of the reasons why some international conflicts result in war while others do not and what induces countries at war to cease fighting. Number 10 is a massive and masterful history of militarism (which the author contrasts with the "military way," this latter being "marked by a primary concentration of men and materials on winning specific objectives of power with the utmost efficiency, that is, with the least expenditure of blood and treasure"). Number 5 is the best attempt, of which I am aware, to analyze the nature of combat as it involves the people actually doing the fighting and dying. It is based on three battles: Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme, but the author brings in more modern battles and generalizes most convincingly and effectively. The casualty figures of modern Western wars are treated in no. 9, an English-language version of a much longer work in

in Russian by a noted Soviet scholar. The interrelation of war and the economic and social history of the West in the past five centuries are discussed in no. 6. Number 2 is the best brief introduction to the history of weapons systems. All include bibliographies or bibliographical notes. I hope soon to produce an annotated bibliography on selected periods and topics in military history since the eighteenth century.

NB Titles designated by an asterisk are available in paperback.

*1. Blainey, Geoffrey. The Causes of War and Peace. New York: Free Press, 1973.

*2. Brodie, Bernard and Fawn M. Brodie. From Crossbow to the H-Bomb. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973, revised and enlarged edition.

3. Fuller, J. F. C. The Conduct of War, 1789-1961: A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolutions on War and Its Conduct. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961.

4. _____ A Military History of the Western World. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1954-56, 3 vols.

5. Keegan, John. The Face of Battle. New York: Viking, 1976.

*6. Nef, John U. Western Civilization Since the Renaissance: Peace, War, Industry and the Arts. New York: Harper and Row, 1963. Originally entitled War and Human Progress.

*7. Preston, Richard A. and Sydney F. Wise. Men and Arms: A History of Warfare and Its Interrelationship with Western Society. New York: Praeger, 1970, 2nd ed.

*8. Ropp, Theodore. War in the Modern World. Durham: Duke University Press, 1959.

9. Ulanis, Boris T. War and Population. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971.

10. Vagts, Alfred. A History of Militarism. New York: Meridian Books, 1959, revised edition.